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AUTHOR Freedman, Philip I.
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ABSTRACT

If one accepts the premises that the school is obliged to develop respect for the right of choice regarding ethnic behavior and attitude, and that the individual has a right to be judged on his/her own merits, then it is appropriate to use a counter-stereotypic curriculum in multi-ethnic education. This approach may be defined as: (1) devotion of curricular time to an ethnic/racial entity in proportion to the pervasiveness of the stereotypy directed against it; and (2) selection in the curriculum of elements of history and culture of a given group which refute the stereotypes attached to it. This sort of educational model will enhance ethnic diversity and solidarity while changing stereotypic misconceptions. To promote effectiveness, the counter-stereotypy approach should be supplemented by incorporation of ethnic history within the framework of American History, introduction of events and personalities of ethnic significance into a variety of topics studied (not just the specific study of ethnicity) and, finally, inclusion of measures for affective education within the context of a socio-psychological analysis of ethnicity. This approach to multicultural education will encourage students to make the sort of "reflective decisions" regarding ethnicity required of them as citizens of a society aspiring to interethnic harmony and respect. (Author/WI)

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COUNTER-STEREOTYPY AS THE BASIS OF MULTI-ETHNIC EDUCATION

Philip I. Freedman

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In a previous article,[1] the writer expressed trepidation about the possibly negative effects of several current proposals[2,3] for the implementation of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic education. The concern arose from a perception that these proposals had been insufficiently conceptualized, that key elements of their objectives were implicit rather than explicit (and that the two sometimes conflicted), and that they did not adequately confront the myriad problems intrinsic to the topic such as proper selection of subject matter, adequate balance between loyalties to varied reference groups, and possible conflict with other, deeply respected and consensually validated aims of education, among others. It was also suggested that multi-ethnic studies must be so structured as to allow for choice on the part of students, the option of identifying oneself more or less with the dominant American more or with the culture of the individual's ancestral ethnic/racial group or any other group or synthesis of groups which appeal to that individual.

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Philip I. Freedman is Associate Professor of Secondary and Continuing Education at Lehman College, City University of New York.

A further criticism of the aforementioned positions was that the groundwork for them, the values and assumptions which must undergird any theoretical posture, had not been adequately adduced. Accordingly, before presenting the conception of multi-ethnic studies which is the theme of this paper the writer stipulates the following beliefs and perceptions:

1. It is desirable to modify the ethnic monochromality which has characterized the teaching of American history and culture up until the last decade or so. However, it is impossible to do full justice to the sagas of all of the diverse ethnic/religious/racial groups which have populated the United States. It follows that there must be selection, apportionment, and arrangement of material and that those processes demand a systematic rationale. Is it necessary to add that a rationale will be inferred if none is consciously applied?

2. The varied ethnic groups have fared differentially within the total community. Some have blended in easily and have accommodated or been accommodated with relative ease; others have known mostly hardship and agony; many fall somewhere between the two extremes.

3. The school is obliged to develop respect for the right of choice regarding ethnic behavior and attitude. The ramifications of such choice include first, the right of a person to select the extent, if any, of behavioral and/or psychological identification with an ancestral group; second, the obligation of the individual to respect the right of fellow humans to make these choices; and third, the right of the citizen to retain his/her evaluations regarding specific cultural values and practices and towards ethnicity in general. Balancing these rights and obligations is a delicate and demanding task as it calls for the reconciliation of opposing apperceptions of the role of ethnicity and race in society and from the tension between relativist and absolutist conceptions of propriety in values and behaviors. A fruitful posture for the school to adopt in this regard is to cultivate the understanding that choices are frequently determined by value judgments emanating from the culture of a specific ethnic entity. Many, if not most of these values cannot be measured by fixed, invariable criteria, and that the existence of such criteria--belief

in which is the student's right--has been a point of contention among the greatest minds of the ages.

4. Any society has a right to develop and to maintain cohesiveness. This is not a call for suppression of diversity; it is, however, a recognition of the reality that a society, in order to remain viable, must encourage general adherence to a substantial portion of common culture. This is particularly so in nations with strongly competing subcultures, one which is susceptible to the communal strife which often accompanies cultural and linguistic competition. Canada, Belgium, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria, to cite a few prominent examples, should give us pause regarding the extent to which we wish to promote subsidiary cultures. Theodore H. White's thesis that the myth of presidential integrity is one of the few bonds uniting the diverse population of the United States underscores the tenuous nature of those bonds.[4] While respecting diversity, the American commonwealth is entitled to engender and encourage ties of unity.

5. The right of an individual to be judged on his/her own merits and achievements must not be abridged by overemphasis on group affiliation. Multi-ethnic education will make little contribution to human liberation if it substitutes an ancestral-collar for an American collar. Actions and plans relative to "benign quotas", not wholly popular even with adherents, suggest that fears about the submersion of the individual are not unwarranted.

Given the above premises, an appropriate approach to multi-ethnicity, one which strikes a harmonious balance between a stabilizing unity and a rich diversity, and strives for a similar balance between respect for the individual and respect for the group; above all, one which seeks to enable a student to formulate his/her own approach to ethnicity as an observer and as a participant in as intellectually free a manner as possible, is one characterized by counter-stereotypy as the basis for inclusion of racial/ethnic groups in the curriculum. Broadly speaking, this approach may be defined as: a) the devotion of curricular time to a given ethnic/racial entity in proportion to the virulence and pervasiveness of stereotypy directed against it, and b) for curricular representation of a group, the selection of those elements of that group's history and culture which refute the stereotypes imposed

upon it. Too often, curricular selection of elements from the universe of scholarship relative to an ethnic/racial culture has neglected to examine its impact upon the prevailing image of that group and has not considered the developmental psychological stages of children and adolescents. The episodes, movements, and biographies culled are usually substantially accurate and frequently include characteristics which evoke admiration and respect among the relatively sophisticated but which, to the relatively naive and immature minds of the young, reinforce a distorted picture of the racial/ethnic entity. The contributions to American society of Jewish financiers, Italian singers, Black athletes, Polish steel workers, etc., estimable in themselves, may harden certain associations of group and behavior in the eyes of children and teenagers and defeat that objective of ethnic study which seeks to engender the understanding that variability within a group is close to and, in some cases, greater than the variance between groups. Also obscured is the reality that people, obviously influenced more or less by their ethnic backgrounds, are complex beings who are formed by a multitude of factors and emerge as distinctive human beings, similar to but not identical with other human beings. Recent studies[5,6] attest to the persistence of stereotypy albeit in modified and attenuated form; these are supported by empirical

observation. Although the causal nexus among stereotypy, prejudicial attitude, and overt discriminatory behavior is not perfectly understood, it is abundantly clear that the phenomena are related and it is reasonable to assume that a variation in one dimension will produce at least some change in the others. A society which maintains solidarity while accommodating diversity must rid itself of the distorted images which still contaminate inter-ethnic perceptions and which interfere with rational discourse regarding the history of ethnicity and its role, present and future, in the life of the country.

It can be argued that focus upon atypical aspects of an ethnic entity's history distorts reality and must perforce contribute to confusion rather than to edification. The objection, however, is more apparent than real when it is appreciated that the populace, including pre-school children, have been "educated"--usually too much so--regarding the "typical" attributes of a racial/ethnic community through the mass media and through the manifold, subtle processes of social mechanisms.

The problem has always been to impress upon our consciousness the knowledge of diversity within groups; emphasis upon the atypical within an ethnic group encourages appreciation of individuality and demonstrates the reality that within a corporate entity, the potential for producing all kinds of personalities and behaviors exists.

These insights also lay the foundation for the understanding that modal tendencies are generalities and not absolutes and that historical, ideological, and social forces are more potent than genetic ones in developing and giving direction to a given society.

The question arises as to whether formal education is an effective weapon in the fight against stereotypy and it must be acknowledged that research regarding this issue does not offer much reason for optimism. Nevertheless, the basic studies in the field reveal that prejudicial outlook is a variable rather than a discrete entity and that one component of negative perception is incorrect and/or incomplete information. It thus follows that a program of accurate information, accurate in the sense of balance and breadth as well as factual veracity, accompanied by selective affective exercises, can modify the image of religious/racial/ethnic groups and re-orient attitudes in realistic, healthful directions. There are no panaceas; the problem of steretypy is a complex one and its solution entails a coordinated, multi-faceted societal approach. However, the school has a role to play, and it can do so by incorporating within its curriculum a program which concentrates on those prejudices and distorted images which have been the most widespread and deep-rooted in our culture. The counter-stereotype approach to multi-

ethnic education also enjoys the advantage of a rationale based upon history and an appeal to justice and fairness. The disputation and contentiousness which might arise (and sometimes has arisen) from an approach which is grounded merely in the injunction "to present accurate information" is minimized by the explanation that time spent studying developments relating to a specific group is proportional to the extent of misperception and consequent oppression suffered by that group. Children can respond rationally and maturely when addressed rationally and maturely: they can understand that Blacks, Hispanic-Americans, Indians, Jews, Southern and Eastern Europeans, and several other communities have endured significantly more hostility than others as targets of hate and when they do understand, they are more likely to eschew envy and resentment over the selection of selected ethnic entities than would be the case if no basis for inclusion had been offered.

A major positive outcome of counter-stereotypy is the enlightened perception it affords of the nature of ethnic groups and the interaction between the group and the individuals who comprise it. Such perception, unencumbered by the emotional and cognitive contaminants of the distorted image frees the viewer to see the person as he/she actually is; to render the "invisible man" of

Ralph Ellison[7] invisible no more. Freedom to see contributes to freedom of thought and action and the individual operating within such freedom is more likely than others to make a decision regarding the role of ethnicity based on reality and reflection.

To enhance effectiveness, the counter-stereotypy approach should be supplemented by several practices which have received substantial approval. A principle of the National Council for the Social Studies[8] which is most welcome is the incorporation of ethnic history within the overall framework of American history. So structured, the contribution of various groups are identified as integral parts of the country's development and as constituting a continuous source of cultural infusion to the nation as a whole. Successfully implemented, this principle enables us to either dispense with or minimize the ethnic "week", that annual genuflection in the direction of Jews, Italians, Greeks, etc., a practice which has usually guaranteed the avoidance of a realistic examination of that group's condition in America the rest of the school year.

In keeping with reality and logic, another practice to observe is that of introducing events and personalities pertinent to a national/cultural body according to historical and/or sociological topic rather

than the topic of ethnicity itself. Introduction of ethnicity according to historical movement--examination of the role of the Chinese and various European nationalities when studying railroad building, analyzing the Latin-American presence during a unit on the acquisition of the Southwest, marking the role of Banneker while learning about the establishment of the nation's capitol--gives the study of ethnicity a natural cast and avoids the appearance of it as an aritificial appendage to the main stream. This view is empirically based; it is also supported by several experiments conducted by the writer in which race was presented casually and as one factor in a total context.[9,10]

Finally, a program of multi-ethnicity must include measures for affective education within the context of a socio-psychological analysis of ethnicity. To enhance the objective of freedom of choice relative to ethnic outlook, the emotional components of the student's existing attitude must be confronted and examined. In light of the experience of recent years, it is obvious that such exercises must be carefully selected and implemented and that they must be stringently controlled to avoid their abuse by unstable individuals, a problem which has often marred efforts at human relations training. Genuine concern about possible distortion and potential psychic damage to children, however, should not obscure

the reality that most theoretical formulations regarding the origin of prejudice ascribe major significance to affective and unconscious factors.[11]

The overall approach described above does not reject the study of the concepts of race and ethnicity, the terrifying consequences for minorities of the manipulation of twisted perceptions of race; neither does it preclude special courses relating to a specific ethnic/cultural group nor does it preclude the observance of special holidays and/or celebrations specific to any such body. The varied cultures of the numerous civilizations that have settled in the United States constitute a reservoir of educational largesse; they enlarge perspective, provide mental and emotional satisfaction and possibly serve as a catalyst to stimulate interest in learning in general. However, the mere presentation of a series of courses on ethnic heritages or the addition of other-than-Anglo ethnic contributions does not come to grips with the philosophical ramifications of the purposes of teaching about such heritages. To contend that the purpose of such education is merely to "provide accurate information"[12] as asserted by an indignant practitioner or to promote ethnic literacy is to reject or omit all that we have learned, and continue to learn, about the effects of selecting specific facts from among a pool of them and/or

grouping them in a particular manner, about the concept of partial truths and about the nuance of emphasis. The approach outlined above offers a rationale for the organization of content pertinent to ethnicity and provides young people with a means of confronting the many-sided question of ethnicity relatively free of restraint, whether purposeful or unintended. So equipped, students can indeed make the "reflective decisions"[13] regarding ethnicity so urgently required of them as citizens of a society aspiring to interethnic-and-person-to-person harmony and respect.

FOOTNOTES

1. Philip I. Freedman,"Multi-Ethnic Studies: Proceed with Caution," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 58, No. 5, January 1977, pp. 401-403.

2. National Council for the Social Studies, NCSS Task Force on Ethnic Studies Curriculum Guidelines, Social Education, Vol. 40, No. 6, October 1976 (Special Supplement).

3. James A. Banks, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, Boston, London, Sydney: Allyn & Bacon, 1975.

4. Theodore H. White, Breach of Faith (1st ed.), New York: Atheneum/Reader's Digest Press, 1975.

5. Gertrude J. Selznick and Stephen Steinberg, The Tenacity of Prejudice, New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row (Harper Torchbooks), 1969.

6. Charles Y. Glock, Roberta Wuthnow, Jane Allen Piliavin, Metta Spencer, Adolescent Prejudice, New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1975.

7. Ralph Ellison, The Invisible Man, New York: Modern Library, 1952.

8. National Council for the Social Studies, Op. Cit.

9. Philip I. Freedman, "Race as a Factor in Persuasion," Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 35, No. 3, Spring 1967, pp. 48-52.

10. Philip I. Freedman, "Racial Attitudes as a Factor in Teacher Education for the Deprived Child." Paper presented at the Convention of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, February 11, 1965.

11. Gordon Allport, Nature of Prejudice, Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1974.

12. H. Prentice Baptiste, Jr., and James E. Anderson, "Letter to the Editor," in "Backtalk," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 58, No. 7, March, 1977, pp. 588-589.

13. Banks, Op. Cit.